

## PROGRAM NOTES

By Steven Ledbetter

**LEÓ WEINER****Divertimento No. 5, Opus 39, *Hungarian Impressions***

*Leó Weiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on April 16, 1885, and died there on September 13, 1960. He composed his Divertimento No. 5 in 1951. The score calls for two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, harp, and strings. Duration is about 11 minutes.*

Though he has been highly regarded in his native Hungary, Leó Weiner has not received as much attention outside Hungary as his skill and accomplished technique deserve. He was just a few years younger than Bartók but remained a more conservative composer, essentially a romantic composer who found his influences in the major German composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Though he did not personally collect Hungarian folk songs (as Bartók and Kodály did), he nonetheless made use of folk songs collected by others. The Divertimento No. 5 is the last of a series of orchestral works celebrating the musical characteristics of his native country. The title *Hungarian Impressions* prepares us for a dash of musical paprika in its five compact movements. One of these, “Verbunk from Pereg” might benefit from a brief explanation. A *verbunk* is a typically Hungarian dance type that was notoriously used (while Hungary was controlled by the Emperor in Vienna) to induce young men to join the army. This was done by providing alcohol and music to induce the potential recruit to drink while dancing more and more frantically, so that finally he was too confused to resist signing when offered recruitment papers. (The name of the dance, *verbunk*, comes from the German word “Werbung”, or recruitment.)

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)****Violin Concerto in A minor, Opus 53**

*Antonín Dvořák was born in Nelahozeves (Mühlhausen), Bohemia, near Prague, on September 8, 1841, and died in Prague on May 1, 1904. He composed the Violin Concerto between July 5 and early September 1879, though he did not complete final revisions until May 25, 1880. Franz Ondříček gave the first performance, in Prague, on October 14, 1883. In addition to the solo violin, the score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.*

The first person to suggest a violin concerto to Dvořák was the publisher Fritz Simrock, who had found the Czech composers’ *Slavonic Dances* a veritable gold mine, and who knew that some prominent Viennese violinists admired Dvořák’s music. Dvořák had begun the concerto when he went to Berlin on July 29, 1879, to hear the famous Joachim Quartet play two of his chamber works. Joachim, one of the Brahms’s closest friends, had known Dvořák’s music for some time, but the two had never met personally.

Dvořák took the opportunity of the Berlin meeting to consult the famous virtuoso about some points in the solo part (just as Brahms had done with his concerto). Joachim was willing to help, so Dvořák sent him the score in December. When the two men met in April 1880 for a detailed discussion, Joachim made many suggestions that the grateful composer adopted in the final version, completed on May 25.

Since the composition appeared while Dvořák was making his mark as a nationalist Bohemian composer and reveling in the friendship and mutual admiration of Johannes Brahms, it can be no surprise that the influence of Brahms is as evident as the presence of Czech folk dance types.

Dvořák gives the orchestra only a few chords of challenge before the soloist appears in a pensive vein, a melody filled with Slavic longing. Normally a first movement is in some kind of sonata form, and Dvořák makes all the right moves at the opening, especially with the transition to the flowing second theme, in C major, which is surely an homage to Brahms. But from this point on Dvořák abbreviates so drastically that the opening movement seems more like a free-form rhapsody than the classical sonata form. He plunges into a development section but surprisingly soon restates the orchestral opening full force, as if this is already the beginning of the recapitulation. And then he actually avoids a restatement of the luscious, Brahmsian second theme. Instead, he tames the violin's opening theme into a gentle echo, which allows it to flow, easily and without a break, into the second movement.

Joachim had his doubts about Dvořák's formal novelties; he was committed to the more classical regularity of a Brahms, as in the concerto he had premiered at the beginning of the same year in which Dvořák was "breaking the rules." This may well be the reason why, though he accepted the dedication of the concerto, he never played the work.

The *Adagio ma non troppo* breathes the serene air of the countryside in its peaceful strains, though Dvořák frequently offers delightful surprises in unexpected harmonic colors, and there are unexpected outbursts and moments of climax before a pair of horns in duet and the delicately embellishing solo violin issue their farewell.

The finale is filled with the spirit of the Czech countryside; almost every tune is in the style of one or another kind of folk dance. Most prominent, and most frequently recurring, is the *furiant* that opens the movement: a dance in triple meter, but with shifting elements of duple meter inside it. Each time this dance returns it has a different color or mood, once even including the imitation of peasant bagpipes. The contrasting episodes include a lilting waltz and another especially Czech type, the *dumka*, a ballad style that alternates between gravity and gaiety. There is hardly a moment in the finale when the soloist is not taking part with great brilliance, so Dvořák saw no need for a cadenza, but simply let the music dance to its conclusion with brilliance and vigor.

## **FRANZ SCHUBERT**

### **Symphony in C Major, D.944 ("Great")**

*Franz Peter Schubert was born in Liechtental, a suburb of Vienna, on January 31, 1797, and died in Vienna on November 19, 1828. He began this symphony in the summer of 1825 and completed it by October 1826. As some point between the summer of 1827 and Schubert's death in November 1828, the symphony received at least one reading at a rehearsal of the orchestra of the Vienna Society of the Friends of Music (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde). The first fully authenticated (and first public) performance, heavily cut, took place on March 21, 1839, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy conducting the orchestra of the Leipzig Gewandhaus. The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets; also three trombones, timpani, and strings.*

Schubert composed no fewer than six symphonies between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. Then he ran into trouble; though he was to live ten years longer, he only finished one more symphony. Yet it was not for want of trying! Extensive sketches survive for other

symphonies, not to mention the two completed movements of the “Unfinished” Symphony in B minor, one of his most magical works. Only the “Great” C major symphony was fully finished—and even it remained unknown and unperformed for more than a decade after Schubert’s early death.

About 1818 something undermined his confidence. For the next five years he began many works, some on a grand scale, that were not finished. Emotional maturing, a desire to express deeper and more intense feelings in his music, and uncertainty as to the means no doubt played a part. So did the overwhelming example of Beethoven, who had redefined the character of the symphony during Schubert’s lifetime. No longer could the symphony be music for entertainment, even of the supremely witty and accomplished kind that Haydn had perfected. Many of Schubert’s attempts simply did not meet his new standards or raised musical problems that he was unable to resolve, so they remained sketches or incomplete torsos.

Going by the numbering in the chronological Deutsch catalogue of Schubert’s works, the “Great” C major symphony (so called to distinguish it from the Symphony No. 6 in the same key) was one of the prolific composer’s final compositions. Indeed, the manuscript bears the date “March 1828,” only eight months before Schubert’s death.

But there is a mystery here. We know that Schubert composed a symphony in the summer of 1825, during a vacation trip to Gmunden and Gastein, and that the following year he submitted a symphony to the Vienna Philharmonic Society in October 1826, though it was never publicly performed. Scholars looked everywhere for a “missing” Schubert symphony. Recently a reconsideration of the evidence has brought quite convincing arguments that the Great C major Symphony is, in fact, the work Schubert composed in Gastein. It was never “lost.”

Studies of the paper on which Schubert wrote his music provide physical evidence for the argument. The “Great” C major Symphony was mostly written on a distinctive paper that Schubert also used for five dated compositions—all of them written in the summer of 1825. Moreover, his idol, Beethoven, used the same paper for his Opus 132 String Quartet, which he was writing in the summer of 1825. The lengthy manuscript of the symphony contains, here and there, four other types of paper, but they occur in passages that he was extending or revising later. The reworking probably took place months or even years after the original work of composition. It seems most likely, then, that Schubert added the date “March 1828” to the autograph when he undertook the final revision of a work that had long since been completed and may even have had a private reading at the Philharmonic Society.

After Schubert’s death in 1828, the work was “lost”—unknown and unperformed—until 1839, when it was seen by a musician, Robert Schumann, who truly valued its significance and arranged for a performance in Leipzig, the first public hearing of this enormous score. In 1840 the symphony had a great success there, but other orchestras regarded it as “too long and difficult.” Gradually audiences and performers came to recognize the truth of Schumann’s ecstatic reaction to this music: “It transports us into a world where we cannot recall ever having been before.”

The first movement begins with a horn theme that might be the typical “slow introduction.” But Schubert welds it to the body of the movement, making it a cornerstone of the entire symphony. The first three notes (C-D-E) cover the interval of a major third, which is heard, either rising or falling, throughout the score. The lengthy lyrical opening eventually turns into the Allegro ma non troppo, with a little fanfare theme (C-G-C-D in a dotted rhythm, repeated) in the strings.

The second movement, in A minor, is laid out on the simplest of musical plans, ABAB, with the B sections appearing in contrasting keys, first F, then A major. Yet the flow of ideas is so lavish and imaginative that one scarcely notices the straightforwardness of the design in the poetry of the elaboration.

The scherzo, too, is elaborated *in extenso* as a full-scale sonata form, a far cry from the binary dance movement of earlier symphonies. In several places Schubert introduces themes that truly waltz, lilting in the style that became the hallmark of Vienna (we tend to forget Schubert as a pioneer of the waltz).

The last movement is nothing short of colossal in time span, energy, or imaginative power. Two separate motives—one dotted, one in triplet rhythm—stand at the outset as a call to attention and a forecast of things to come. Both play a role in the opening theme, which grows with fierce energy to the dominant cadence. After a pause, a brilliantly simple new idea—four repeated notes in the unison horns—generates an independent marchlike theme that shows off its possibilities later on as it dominates the extended development. The opening dotted motive prepares the recapitulation with increasing intensity, though when it arrives, Schubert arranges matters so as to bring it back in the completely unexpected key of E-flat! The first section of the recapitulation is abridged, but it works around to C major for the more lyric march of the secondary theme. This closes quietly on a tremolo C in the cellos; they sink down two steps to A, starting the massive coda, which reworks the materials nearly as extensively as the development section in the middle of the movement. The mood passes from mystery and darkness to the glorious sunshine of C major as the symphony ends in a blaze of glory.

